



SCHIP-Wrecked

by Rep. Tom Price ([more by this author](#))

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Despite impassioned pleas from House Republicans to meet the original bipartisan intent of SCHIP, the new majority is moving forward with a massive expansion of government-controlled health care under the auspices of helping poor children. Sadly, when they offer the President their veto-worthy bill, the new majority will declare politics more important than the health care of our nation's poor children.

As passed, the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) offers states funding to provide health insurance to children in households with an annual income of up to \$42,000. SCHIP has been vital for millions of America's poor children, and both parties are eager to reauthorize the program before it expires at the end of this month.

Proponents of the Democrat reauthorization trumpet a disingenuous, but politically powerful objective of helping America's kids. Yet the plan passed by this Congress offers coverage to those in households with income up to \$62,000 per year, additionally including 21 year-old adults as children. Any honest discussion about this SCHIP proposal reveals that it is not about needy children, but rather an insincere attempt to further usurp the health freedom of the American people.

A recent Congressional Budget Office (CBO) study revealed that an overwhelming 77% of children affected by this expansion already have personal health insurance. Expanding income eligibility for SCHIP will serve as a taxpayer funded substitute to these personal insurance plans, resulting in many children who already have health insurance leaving the private sector for the taxpayer rolls.

As the income requirements are eased, the CBO estimates that 2.1 million children who currently have insurance will drop it for the government-run program. As they leave for SCHIP coverage, premiums for those still holding private coverage will rise, encouraging even more to sign up for taxpayer-funded SCHIP in a

dangerous downward cycle.

Meanwhile, because of serious flaws in the administration of the program, between five and six million children currently eligible for SCHIP or Medicaid have yet to be enrolled. Rather than expanding coverage to those who already have private coverage, Congress should support the original objective and cover the children who need health care the most.

But this bill is clearly less about helping children, and more about scoring political points. House Democrats have made it clear that this debate is just the next step in their desired march toward Washington control of health care. They desire a one-size-fits-all system that erodes the ability of patients and doctors to make independent, personal health care decisions.

As a physician, I can attest to the danger in government-run, bureaucratic health care. A Washington approach endangers quality of care and drives up costs for all Americans. The inefficiency of government-run care is well documented. While the cost per child in private, personal coverage is \$2,300, it costs the American taxpayer \$4,000 per child in SCHIP.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, patients with SCHIP and Medicaid coverage are four times more likely to visit the emergency room for care as those with personal insurance. Rather than seeking care through a primary care physician, those on SCHIP rolls add to the costly and rationed emergency medical system.

A responsible solution to the uninsured problem would ensure that more people have the benefits of personal health coverage. The approach taken by Democrats will only breed a more tangible dependence on government health care coverage.

Many have unfairly claimed that Republicans oppose SCHIP reauthorization. This is flatly wrong. In fact, House Republicans have introduced legislation, the SCHIP Extension Act of 2007, to reauthorize the program in a manner consistent with its original intent.

When presented the new majority's disingenuous proposal, the President should reject the legislation and Congress must sustain his veto. This will allow for a true

bipartisan solution to provide full funding for SCHIP that reflects its original bipartisan intent.

House Republicans and the President must take a principled and positive stand in this debate. To use children's health care to make a political point is disingenuous and only hurts poor children who are suffering the most.

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